THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Speaking of Poetry, John Peale Bishop - - - - - - -
Mr. George Moore and His High Hat: An Open Letter
Candida: A Mystery - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

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The Measure

A Journal of Poetry

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Abelard and Heloise

FROM THE BRETON

Carmina vel coelo possunt deducere lunam.

I WAS a child of twelve when I left my father's house,
When I left with my love, my Abelard, the wise.

And the good Lord knows it was Breton that I spoke
When my lover, the wise man, and I went to Nantes.

And the good Lord knows that it was only prayers
I learned when I was little in my father's house.

Now I've learned it all, now I am learned
And the French and Latin tongues are like Breton to me.

I can read and write, I can talk theology
And consecrate the Host as well as any priest.

I can stop a priest in the middle of a mass,
Or wear a priestly robe myself and knot it at my waist.

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I know where there is gold, gold among the ashes,
I turn sand to silver when I get the chance.

I'm a black bitch, I'm a crow, when I want to be,
A dragon, or a goblin with a wheel of fire.

I know a song that will make the Heavens shake
Make the ocean quiver and the dry land sway.

I know, I know, all that everybody knows,
Everything that ever was, all that's yet to be.

Abelard the scholar and I made a potion,
Made it of a crow's eye, a toad's cold heart.

Made it of the seed of ferns of very deep wells;
Made it of the golden root of the prairie grass;

The root I plucked at sunrise, barehead, barefoot,
Going up the prairie with my breast and shoulders bare.

I tried out the compound to see if it was magic,
First on a millet-field on the Abbot's land.

The Abbot sowed a lot of seed, eighteen measures,
But he only reaped a fistfull when the harvest came.

I've a silver box that I keep at my father's
And anyone that opens it will wish he'd kept it shut.

There are three snakes there, that warm a dragon's egg,
And if the dragon hatches there'll be hell let loose.

If my dragon ripens the whole world will suffer
For the flames that he sputters will carry twenty miles.

I don't feed my snakes on partridges or woodcocks
But on the blood of babies that I've somehow killed.

The first one I did to death was being baptized;
The priest had his surplice on, the water in his hand.

They took it to the cross-roads. I took off my shoes,
And crept in my stocking feet to dig it up again.

If I remain on earth, and my Light with me,
If we remain on earth for a year or two;

If we may have the earth, my wise man and I,
We are the two that will turn it upside down.

—Be careful young Heloise, be careful of your soul.
This may be your world but the next world is God's.—

Raymond Holden

Speaking of Poetry

THE ceremony must be found
that will wed Desdemona to the huge Moor.

It is not enough—
to win the approval of the Senator,
or to outwit his disapproval; honest Iago
can manage that: it is not enough. For then,
though she may pant again in his black arms
(his weight resilient as a Barbary stallion's)
she will be found
when the Ambassadors of the Venetian state arrive
again smothered. These things have not been changed,
not in three hundred years.
(Tupping is still tupping,
though that particular word is obsolete.
Naturally the ritual would *not* be in Latin.)

For though Othello had his blood from kings,
his ancestry was barbarous, his ways African,
his speech uncouth. It must be remembered
that though he valued an embroidery—
three mulberries proper, on a silk like silver—
it was not for the subtlety of the stitches,
but for the magic in it. Whereas—Desdemona
once contrived to imitate in needlework
her father's shield, and plucked it out
three times, to begin again, each time,
with diminished colours. This is a small point
but indicative. Desdemona was small and fair,
delicate as a grasshopper
at the tag end of summer: a Venetian
to her noble finger tips.

O, it is not enough
that they should meet, naked, at dead of night

in a small inn on a dark canal. Procurers
less expert than Iago can arrange as much.

The ceremony must be found

Traditional, with all its symbols
ancient as the metaphors in dreams;
strange, with never before heard music; continuous
until the torches deaden at the bedroom door.

John Peale Bishop

Trapped

WHEN you hear iron teeth go snap,
And know Death has you in a trap—
Your flesh become your crimson fetter;
Though you feel your chalk bone shatter,
Though your sick nerves feel the spasm
Of lightnings lancing the sky's chasm,
Do not fear or hesitate,
Lest your courage come too late.

Think of mink and little weasel,
And make your callous teeth a chisel,
Think of how they fret and gnaw
The plasmic fetter of their paw,
By amputation to win free
To a three-footed liberty!

E. Merrill Root

Mr. George Moore and His High Hat

Dear Louise,—

This *Anthology of Pure Poetry,* edited, with an introduction, by George Moore, and published in a limited autographed edition by Boni and Liveright, is interesting, and it's a beautiful book. I might have liked it better, I think, without the introduction, and etc., as Jack Keefe would say. I might have enjoyed doping out for myself George Moore's theory of poetry; and if he wanted to call the kind of poetry he liked "pure" poetry, I don't think I would have objected to his little term of endearment. I might have wondered about it somewhat, as I do about the lady in Brooklyn, who wrote in and told you that Prospect Park was much more chaste a park than our own Central Park. I might maybe have found something spiritually common to that lady and George Moore. But what I was going to say was that when George Moore, with elaborate elegance, explains it all for me, and talks of compiling "a book that would be a real advancement to the study of poetry—an anthology of pure poetry, the only one that is lacking on the bookstalls," I don't like his way of doing it. Dressed-up dogmatism, I call it.

Figure it out for yourself. If you and I and, say, Calvin Austin, ever felt like getting out an Anthology of Regular Poetry, or Real Poetry, or True Poetry, or something of the sort, one or two things would have to be different. B. J. Brimmer or the Four Seas Co. would probably bring out the book, at our expense, for one thing. But we could have a Conversation in West Twenty Second Street, toss off a few subtleties on the five-floor walk-upness of the office, and make a recherché observation or two on the comparative excellence of shredded wheat and corn flakes. And then we could say, "Well, well, if here isn't Joey with the coffee!" All this would seem very ridiculous, whether we knew anything about poetry or not. If you don't see why George Moore having his boy friends in to dinner and making cracks about the turbot and the sandal-wood tea-boxes is not equally ridiculous, you will find the answer in

Veblen.* Oh, well: the point is not to let the unsophisticated readers of *The Measure* be over-awed by the meretricious appearance of this book; it is an interesting anthology, but it is not as important as George Moore thinks it (he) is, and deserves no more respect *per se* than an anthology compiled by John P. Stash of Beehive, Kansas, or the Sweet Singer of the Aroostook. But you know a lot of simple right-thinking homey folks are going to be taken in by it, none the less.

II

"My dear friends," begins Mr. Moore, "if you approve of my definition of pure poetry, something that the poet creates outside of his own personality"—and right there I must stop. I do not approve of that definition. I feel pretty sure that no one can create outside of his own personality. "Man can create nothing but himself," says Bernard Shaw, who knows more about poets than you might suppose. What poets can do is create, across a void, into the conscious or unconscious reaches of another personality. The thrill of that union has been called many things, from the "aesthetic emotion" to the "marriage of true minds;" it is the kingdom and the power and the glory of poets. And the ability to discharge this poetic function depends primarily on the richness of the poet's equipment. Shakespeare is a better poet than Eddie Guest because he is spiritually a more wealthy man.

I find further elaboration of Mr. Moore's theory:—"The reason may be stated why we are in these things at the heart of poetry: because these poems were born of an admiration of the only permanent world, the world of things." Because ideas are subject to the whim of taste and fashion, because morality, patriotism, duty and religion take on different meanings every ten years, Mr. Moore loathes proselytism in poetry. So do most of us, I suppose; and we can understand Wallace Stevens' saying

> "Beauty is momentary in the mind,—
> The fitful tracing of a portal:
> But in the flesh it is immortal."

**The Theory of the Leisure Class.*

Ideas, then, on the one hand; things, on the other. Emotions? George Moore, apparently, has never seen them, or heard of them. He does evince a little uneasiness over the pairing-sorrows of young people who are trying to be poets: but even these he happily soon forgets as he readily remembers how much he knows about painting. Anger, hate, love, passion, rage, pity, despair—all are neither one thing nor another, it seems. Shakespeare's

> "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time:
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!"

or Milton's rage and hatred of the false shepherds in *Lycidas,* or Marvell pleading with his coy mistress, for that

> "Always at my back I hear
> Time's winged chariot hurrying near. . . .
>
> The grave's a fine and quiet place
> But none, I think, do there embrace"—

or, going back beyond the limits of our own language, Catullus modern cry

> "Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requiris,
> Nescio, sed fieri sentio, ac excrucior."

—are these such things as, too, pass silently away?

From the hint above, you can guess George Moore's attitude toward the younger people. You can see that he doesn't want to be reminded of them. There must be a psychological reason for such deliberate misunderstanding as this: "Modern poetry is concerned almost exclusively with ideas." In all fairness Mr. Moore might have permitted Mr. De La Mare at least the rejoinder "Mine isn't." And I wonder why Rupert Brooke's catalogue of things in *The Great Lover* would not be objective enough to suit him, or Ralph Hodgson's poem, *The Bull.* And then I turn to the back pages of the anthology to see what modern poets he has, and find, the very last, Swinburne! And that clears up the entire matter.

For, you see, this anthology is based on the theory of an old man. The pure love of an external world is an old man's love, pure delight in the objective an old man's delight. Ideas change as

decades change; emotions wither and atrophy; things alone, in all this world, remain. What can a man and an artist do but admire and love the owl and the cuckoo, the linnet and the lark, the river and the meadow and the last red leaf? But what George Moore does not realize is that his love is not as pure, as innocent, as impersonal, as he thinks. "It is difficult to separate an object from the association of the thing presented." And, of course, with time, your associations with things grow and increase; the field you played in as a child commanded no particular respect of yours at the time, —but go back to it now, and notice the difference. Any field, in fact, attains to part of that same importance. Ideas vanish, and emotions disappear, and the feeling, the association, that surrounded and accompanied those old foolish notions, is drawn off into those magnetic and apparently stolid objects that were all around you then. And ten or twenty years later you wonder at a stone or a river, and never surmise yourself in it, and think of your veneration as an innocent pure affection for the objective. Happy innocence! Of course we pay homage to things: even at thirty I notice their increasing power over me, and what it must be like at sixty I can only imagine.

III

There are in the anthology seventy-four poems, nineteen of which are songs by Shakespeare. Of the rest, three poets, Shelley, Poe, and Blake, comprise nearly a half. Most of the poems are excellent; an occasional inclusion makes me feel that any mention of a cuckoo or a sheep was enough to endow a poem with the required objective charm, and I think, foolishly enough, of Mr. Harry Thaw and his rabbits. I am grateful for three poems especially, which first delighted me in high school;—Shelley's *Arethusa,* (which was in the notes of my Virgil), and *Kubla Khan,* and *The Lady of Shalott.* I am grateful for a poem which I never saw before; it makes me want to know more about John Clare—

CLOCK-A-CLAY

"In the cowslip pips I lie,
Hidden from the buzzing fly,
While green grass beneath me lies,
Pearled with dew like fishes' eyes,
Here I lie, a clock-a-clay,
Waiting for the time of day.

"While the forest quakes surprise,
And the wild wind sobs and sighs,

My home rocks as like to fall,
On its pillar green and tall;
When the pattering rain drives by
Clock-a-clay keeps warm and dry.

"Day by day, and night by night,
All the week I hide from sight;
In the cowslip pips I lie,
In rain and dew still warm and dry;
Day and night, and night and day,
Red, black-spotted clock-a-clay.

"My home shakes in wind and showers,
Pale green pillar topped with flowers,
Bending at the wild wind's breath,
Till I touch the grass beneath;
Here I live, lone clock-a-clay,
Watching for the time of day."

Still, I am not sure that this is even the best possible anthology of objective poetry. There may have been nothing in Donne, Dryden, Byron, Wordsworth, the Rossettis, the Brownings; but Burns? Gray? Yeats? Francis Thompson? John Keats is represented by one poem . . . . but George Moore thinks of John Keats as "a pussycat on a sunny lawn."

Well, that's about all. *The Measure* may go to press, now; and George Moore go on eating his soles, whiting, cod, haddock, salmon, salmon trout, brill, plaice, shad, and other elegant fish. All's one for that, you might say. As for me, I prefer my anthologies like *The Week-End Book**, with its ideal introduction, its entire freedom from swank, and its happy collection of "great poems." Beyond question, the first poem is one of the greatest in our language.

Yours for purity and greatness,

Rolfe

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Candida: A Mystery

ANYONE who is troubled by the apparent fact that there are many writers of verse and few poets may get a little insight into the problem at a comparatively low price by going to see Candida. Not long ago I went up to the Actors' Theater quite unsuspecting, to get an earful of metaphysical bon-mots from Mr. G. B. Shaw. There, upon a fine pre-raphaelite stage, spilling poetical phrases such as "a beggar crying for a lady's shawl," "lilies in her hand," and "a wreath of stars about her brow," was Eugene P. Marchbanks, Eighteenth Baron Boy. Well, that young man, for all the words of his mouth, was a poet. He was the type and shape of man, ventured over the brink of a confining life, upon a terrible and hurtful world of dizzy wisdom. Candida and her Christian Socialist husband could not say a word but he was at the other side of it waiting for them with a meaning which they had not guessed themselves. He was a child, a savage, if you will. Yet, looking like something less than a man, he turned out to be something more. He was someone who had an immediate apprehension, almost an anticipation, of everything that happened or could happen,—someone who knew that all action, all talk, not based upon that suddenness of apprehension was just so much buttered shoe-leather and absolutely unpalatable to the soul. He was a poet, because all material to him was raw, uncured by any sophistication of the safeguarding wit; and because, therefor, everything was something to create. It did not matter that he suffered, that he squirmed and evaded, for the fact of his trespass upon a world that is no more hospitable to man than the pit of volcano gave him dignity, stature, and vision. That young man, although Bernard Shaw did not manage to make him write poetry, would well repay the study and perhaps almost the tears of any one alive who thinks that it is possible to write poetry without going through the hair-shirt and hot-stones of being a poet.

Calvin Austin

The Darkness of the Contemporaries

THE young can never wholly come out of that shadow. A poetry magazine, that can be nothing but an eye waiting for some vision to be cast upon its retina, too often receives that vision dulled and blurred. The young hesitate to say the thing precisely as their "obscure necessity" prompts them to say it. Poems, perhaps, should be a certain shape, they say to themselves. This year one shape, next year another. Perhaps no one will hear or see unless their emotion is packed into that shape. They thumb piles of current magazines, and what they finally write may not be what they needed to write. It is not "at the center."

The young Pope served his time by polishing the epigrams of the old Wycherly. Young Goethe paid tithe to *Sturm und Drang*. Old bones are good for young teeth. But when the teeth are cut they should bite into their own food. Youth should be harangued into arrogance: into courage to learn the heft and swing of English poetry in the tradition, when everyone is writing free verse, to exact from itself its own medium and that only, when the magazines are lined with neat sonnets and quatrains. If it write poetry at all, it should do it with conviction. A poet, even a young one, does not ask an editor if there should be a comma in line three. He should be willing to battle with the editor because of that comma.

The mystic recognizes his own dark night of the soul, if he feels an emptied heart, cut off from whatever thing he considers grace. Youth, posturing in a stale gallery of mirrors or with one ear to the ground, alert for rumors, often thinks that he stands in the full light of creation. To be cut off and not to know,—that is the triple darkness.

Louise Bogan.

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